



1.913
C3 As7
1939

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Washington, D. C.

FEDERAL-STATE RELATIONS AFFECTING AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMS*

By
M. L. Wilson
Under Secretary of Agriculture

Discussions of Federal-State relationships in agriculture are always timely because administrative and policy-forming people, both in the States and in the Federal Government, know that sound progress cannot be made in their work without harmony and cooperation. If the State and Federal Governments are to accomplish what the people expect of them, it cannot be otherwise.

I have had the stimulating experience of listening to several papers and discussions before this Association on this general subject of Federal-State relations. The particular area of discussion has varied over the years. Until 1933, discussion centered largely around relations in research and in education. Since 1933, with the coming of what we call "action" programs, there has naturally been a good deal of thinking about how these newer activities of the Federal Government will affect relations with the States.

Now, there is no doubt that this matter of Federal-State relations is one of the most important of the many problems common to the Department of Agriculture and the Land-Grant Colleges. I won't say it is the most important, for I don't believe it is. But I think it is certainly among those that the Colleges and the Department must study continuously, if we, and the public too, are to preserve that feeling of satisfaction that has grown out of three-quarters of a century of cooperation between the Federal and State Governments in the field of agriculture.

Any discussion of Federal-State relations should start from a consideration of the basic principles of our American system of government. A federal system is a dual system--that is, governmental authority is divided between two sets of governmental representatives, each set operating in the same geographical area but on different aspects of the total job of government. As with most human institutions, a dual system of government works best when activated by a cooperative spirit. For there is no hard and fast line between the two halves of the system--no line that says, here federal authority ends and here State authority begins. In between is a twilight zone in which the Supreme Court has been working ever since our national government was established. In times of rapid change this zone is of extreme importance. Then it is the scene of new efforts put forth both by the States and by the Federal Government.

*Presented before the Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, Washington, D. C., November 15, 1939.

There are a number of ways in which the Federal Government and the several State governments can and do cooperate. One of these is the grant-in-aid device. We are all of us more or less familiar with this device because it has figured so prominently for a great many years in carrying forward resident instruction, research and extension work in agriculture. To operate the device we take three steps. First, the Federal Government in a general statement describes the purpose for which the funds are to be used. Second, the Federal Government fixes the conditions which the States are to meet in accepting the grants. And, finally, through a periodic check-up the Federal Government determines whether the grants have been employed for the purpose for which they were appropriated.

Now it is not necessary to elaborate on the various fields in agriculture where the grant-in-aid device has been employed with satisfaction to both the Federal Government and the States. We are all familiar with the fact that this device was employed when the land-grant college system was established in 1862; that it was used again when our system of agricultural experiment stations was created; and again, a quarter of a century ago, when cooperative extension work in agriculture was begun.

The grant-in-aid device was a characteristic feature of Federal-State cooperation in agriculture down to 1933. But it was not the only device employed. Simultaneously with the appropriation of Federal funds for grants-in-aid to the States in the field of agricultural research, there developed a considerable program of Federal agricultural research financed by funds appropriated directly to the Department. In spending these funds the Department consulted States as to particular problems which could best be explored by the Federal Government. No serious difficulty has ever been encountered in arriving at informal agreements, and in defining principles which for many years have governed the expenditure of this type of appropriation.

With the coming of economic depression in agriculture and Federal legislation to meet that emergency, a third method of cooperation was devised. Starting in 1933 Congress responded to pressures from farmers and appropriated funds for agricultural adjustment, soil conservation, erosion control, rural rehabilitation and relief, crop insurance, rural electrification, and other new kinds of work. The Secretary of Agriculture was designated by Congress to spend these funds. This method of administration is desirable for a number of reasons recognized in all quarters. The depressed condition of agriculture was not confined to any particular region or locality. It was Nation-wide. Because of the very volume of funds involved, it was imperative to vest responsibility for expenditure in a single responsible person. And in order to avoid wasted effort, duplication and overlapping, it seemed wise also, from an administrative standpoint, to authorize and direct a Federal official to spend the funds in such a way as to achieve the purposes envisaged by Congress.

At first glance it might seem that Congress had departed from the traditional method of dealing with agricultural problems. On closer examination, however, it is seen that Congress did not displace old and tried methods. It merely added another method because of the magnitude and seriousness of the

situations. The Congress directed the Secretary to spend appropriations by employing direct administration where that seemed necessary and desirable and to call on the States whenever the knowledge and experience of the States could be used to good advantage. Thus Congress has authorized a number of methods to meet unprecedented problems. The problems facing the Federal and State Governments are vast and complex, and Congress wants all of our tested cooperative devices to be employed, each in its proper place, in meeting the challenge of those problems.

Because of its dual character our American system of Government creates many problems that do not confront a unitary system. In agriculture, however, we are extremely fortunate in having one great advantage. By and large, the men who serve the States and the Federal Governments have the same farm background. In large measure both are products of the land-grant college system. Many have served in both institutions. I doubt if there is any other place in our dual system of government where you will find as much like-mindedness and similarity among State and Federal people as you will find in agriculture. This is a great asset.

Now, because we have two sets of institutions in agriculture, one thing stands out clearly. Executive, administrative, and policy-forming people in each set of institutions want each to maintain its identity and integrity. Neither wants to be dominated by the other. This is a personal belief which I have arrived at after having served in land-grant colleges for 22 years and in the Department for 9 years. The findings which Dean Buchanan set forth so clearly in his paper before the Association last year corroborate this feeling. It is natural, Dean Buchanan said, not to have unanimity of thinking in faculties of forty-eight States. He found land-grant institutions were generally agreed, however, that they should help implement Federal agricultural programs in the fields of research and extension in the States. When it came to administration of Federal measures, this, he found, was a job not for the colleges but for the Department of Agriculture. The colleges, he said, do not want and should not be forced to accept responsibility for administering national agricultural programs.

As chairman of the Departmental Committee on Federal-State relationships, I am aware of certain attitudes and situations which seem to irritate some Federal and State people. But when we consider the rapid changes of the last seven years, the organization and the putting into operation of the numerous agricultural programs; when we consider human nature as it is, I marvel that there is so little irritation, suspicion, and trouble in the minds and hearts of either. The first time I attended a land-grant college meeting Dean Davenport of Illinois talked about the impending dangers of domination of the States by the Federal Government. If accepted, at face value, the impression that I got from Dean Davenport's speech--I heard it along about 1912 or 1913--I would say that today we don't have any problem at all.

Everyone is aware of the increasing importance of government in the every-day affairs of people. Today we face many problems which individual

people, or localities, or regions, no longer feel themselves competent to solve without aid. They have asked the assistance of government in meeting these problems, and government has responded.

This is just as true in agriculture as it is in other fields. There is a strong tendency for farm people to turn to Congress and the administrative arms of the Federal Government for help in improving their economic condition. Some people think this tendency is unfortunate. Of its existence, however, and of its strength there is no doubt. One result has been an uneven growth in activities of Federal and State and local governments. In going direct to the Federal Government for assistance, and passing over State and local governments in doing so, the people have, unconsciously perhaps, contributed to the failure of State and local governments to employ fully their own powers.

Theoretically, I suppose it would be possible for the States to set up programs to rehabilitate farmers of low income, to increase and stabilize farm income, to conserve the soil and do the other things which the Federal Government is now trying to do. Actually, of course, it has not been possible. This is not to say that the States have not done a great deal to rehabilitate farm and rural people. They have done a lot, and they will no doubt do a great deal more. In the emergency, many States passed mortgage moratoria and took other steps to relieve a bad situation. They are going ahead with more permanent legislation. Some States are now revising their tenancy laws. Many are tackling tax revision and the complicated problem of what to do with tax-delinquent lands. Thirty-six States have enacted soil conservation districts laws. The States are showing interest, and taking active part, in State and local planning. That a more comprehensive program has not been set up is not a reflection on the States. In a situation such as we had in 1932-33, Nation-wide measures were necessary. In fact many State governments recognized this and joined with the farm organizations, individuals, and groups in urging the Federal Government to take necessary steps. The Federal Government did so, and created, among other things, a new and important phase of Federal-State relations in agriculture.

A good deal of what is now called the Federal-States relations problem is the outgrowth of this development. It points to the need of research in the area where the traditional methods of Federal-State cooperation in agriculture come in contact with Federal administration of funds appropriated by Congress for agricultural adjustment, improvement of farm income, rural rehabilitation and relief. More attention given to research in this area would produce fruitful results.

Are national agricultural programs permanent? There are two divergent viewpoints. One maintains that such programs were, and are, wholly of an emergency character. Consequently, according to this view, the life of these programs will be short. Other opinion, however, definitely holds that these programs are responses to fundamental changes in our civilization; that they are essential to the well-being of American agriculture. According to this view, they are necessary if agriculture is to receive its fair share of the

national dividend and grow in a balanced way with the rest of our economy. They are necessary if we are to conserve the soil, so that farming can be carried on with the permanency of American civilization always in mind. They are necessary if the under-privileged in agriculture are to receive aid and assistance and share the fruits of our civilization.

Personally, I share the view that these Federal programs are here to stay. If they are, two recent developments of great significance are noteworthy. One is the emergence of the idea that a unified approach to the problems of the individual farmer and of the community is paramount if the various programs are to work properly. The second is State and county land-use planning.

I seem to detect the first tendency in a great many different places--among farmers themselves, among the leaders of the farm organizations, among members of Congress, land-grant college people, the Department of Agriculture. By the "complete" farm approach I mean the tendency to think in terms of a unified, coordinated program. Many who are trying to think their way through today's maze of problems say that in one way or another all the facts and factors pertaining to a particular farm or a particular community are related. We need, they say, to get all parts of the Extension program, the research programs, the action programs so related that each harmonizes with the other, and supplements the other.

All of us have given much thought to these matters the past few years. The conservation practices encouraged by the AAA need to be more closely tied into the kind of thing that makes for a sound system of farming. We are making progress. AAA procedure requires a farm plan for each cooperating farm; in building that farm plan certain judgments have to be made regarding the use of land on the farm. Few people other than those who are familiar with the AAA procedure realize the great educational importance and value of these plans. Likewise, before the Soil Conservation Service begins operations on a farm it works out a complete farm plan, and tries to relate everything it does in the interest of conservation to the daily life of the farm family. Again, when the Farm Security Administration makes a loan to a client, or assists a tenant to become an owner, a complete farm plan and a complete family living plan, with a budget and a schedule of operation, is worked out. When the Forest Service approaches a particular area or community with a sustained yield program, it has in mind the same viewpoint -- a unified approach.

These are only a few illustrations of a tendency I observe everywhere I go. I am becoming more and more impressed with it. There is a big difference between this way of approaching the farm situation and the way we used to approach it, when we regarded each particular practice or procedure as something not definitely related to other procedures and practices. From my standpoint this unitary conception has very great, and I believe very encouraging, implications. It recognizes the organic nature of agriculture and the unity of the activities which in the aggregate make up the daily round of farm life.

This kind of activity points to the uncrystallized area between Federal agricultural programs and State and local programs. A big part of our problem, it seems to me, is to determine how the States and Federal Government can bring to bear the best science has to offer in studying this area and encouraging this tendency to make coordinated unified plans. Neither the land-grant colleges nor the Department of Agriculture has the final answer. To reach an answer we shall have to pool a lot of ideas; we shall have to be tolerant of one another's opinions; we shall have to remain patient, and retain our good will; but I am sure it can be done.

The other encouraging tendency I referred to relates to county land-use planning. This venture is one of the most hopeful and encouraging developments I know. The way the States and counties have set up the organization provided by the Mt. Weather agreement is worthy of the highest commendation. The way the procedures are being worked out in this new and untried field is heartening. The attitudes that have prevailed in carrying through Work Outline No. 1 show definitely that understanding is the keynote of this cooperative enterprise. The wholesome relationships existing between farm people, experts and administrators give us every reason to hope for plans that will express the intelligent experiences and foresight of farm people and the knowledge of specialists.

The colleges of agriculture and the Department of Agriculture have always worked in a spirit of good fellowship in the past. The action programs have injected a new element into this relationship, and I think State and county agricultural land-use planning groups can provide the cement to bind them together even more closely in the future. In county planning work the efforts of the colleges and of the Department are truly cooperative. The views of your people and of ours are merged, and presented in such a way as to get the most sympathetic reception from State and county people. But let me repeat--there is need for patience, not only on the part of the people in the Department of Agriculture, but also on the part of the farmer members of the State and county committees. It must not be expected that administrators of action programs can always adopt the suggestions made by planning groups. Legal or administrative considerations can stand in the way. If we can work out sound land-use plans, always working with the farmers, I think we are going to find that the basic features of these plans will ultimately be accepted by county, State and Federal Government. In the particular field of land-use planning I suspect that these recommendations of farm people will receive the active sanction and support of the national farm organizations, one of whose principal functions is to translate the will and thought of farmers into State and national legislation.

At its best, cooperation calls for continuous and mutual adaptation of the views of the Department of Agriculture and of the colleges in the fields of county planning and of unified farm plan development. In the last analysis, cooperation rests upon the personal qualities of the people taking part. For want of a better term I call it the personal factor in administration. The personal factor is a most essential part of democracy and it always influences policy formation. It is one part of the administrative and policy formation

process that cannot be reduced to a formula, or to a statement of general principle, or even to an unambiguous axiom. Intangible as it is, however, it is a factor all of us appreciate and all of us recognize as critical in carrying out cooperative programs. Understanding of other peoples' views, tolerance, a willingness to give and take, a deep desire to agree on common objectives--these are all elements which bulk large in the successful administration of any program, be it action, education, or research. They are of particular importance in a program in which responsibility is divided and each group is anxious to avoid being dominated by the other. If we are to achieve understanding and tolerance, the officials concerned must get to know each other. They must discuss their problems in the atmosphere of the field where they can touch and feel a common endeavor.

With this thought in mind suggestions were made that the States and the Federal Department try this year a series of traveling conferences, made up of policy-forming and administrative people of both the Department of Agriculture and the land-grant colleges. We could have had 4 or 5 regional conferences in the ballroom of a hotel, such as we have had in the past. But we thought it more worthwhile to go on a kind of county agent's tour, going from State to State, seeing first hand the problems which people in the States thought the group should see, seeing farms participating in the AAA program, visiting Farm Security clients, rehabilitation projects, soil conservation areas, forest areas, and so on. In such a traveling conference like-minded people who by chance are affiliated with two different institutions, could mix in a congenial manner, enjoy good-natured give-and-take on the ground, talk and argue about all elements without official commitment. I am sure a number of the State people feel that such a traveling conference gives them an opportunity to see the problems of the region in which their State is located and look at them as the Department of Agriculture looks at them. By the same token, it gives the policy-forming and administrative people of the Department an opportunity to see a lot of things the way the State people see them.

I have been greatly gratified at the manner in which the representatives of the different agencies have reported back their conferences to their particular organizations. This winter, after the traveling conferences have all been completed, we will endeavor to have a series of seminars in the Department as a kind of follow-up.

These conferences are pretty hard work and a pretty big task for the Department. The series is not yet completed. Traveling conferences are yet to be held in the Southern and some of the Middle States. It takes a lot of time. Many people here can bear witness that these traveling conferences are not vacation junkets. We got up early in the morning, and we went to bed late at night; but, when we got home, we in the Department felt gratified and deeply appreciative of the uniformly fine cooperative spirit shown by all the States.

I am indebted somewhat to the late Dean Mumford of Illinois, for the traveling conference idea. If the thing as he outlined it to me is correct, and I think it is, we need badly some kind of simple, practical institution

which brings together on the ground, in the field, where the problems are and where the farmers are, the administrative and policy-forming people of these two similar groups--an institution which brings them together under circumstances and in such a spirit that no one feels he must wear protective armor lest somebody catch him off guard and put something over.

In 1937, on my own motion, I went to Urbana to have a sort of father-and-son talk with my good friend, the late Dean Mumford. His thinking and mine had always "clicked" pretty well and I had a number of matters in mind on which I desired to get his judgment. I remember very well his saying at the close of a long visit over this very problem of Federal and State relationships, "Well, M.L., it is to a large extent a matter of personalities and attitudes." We can work out memorandums of agreement between State and Federal institutions, but they will not amount to much if the personalities of the men don't click, if they are suspicious of each other, if they think they always have to be on the look-out to prevent somebody putting something over on them. "One of the things we need," said Dean Mumford, "in these days when administrators and directors spend so much time in conferences, is some kind of institutions that will really bring State and Federal people closer together, where they can more accurately see each other's point of view."

The institution Dean Mumford was groping for may or may not be the type of traveling conference which so many of us have participated in during the past summer.

You will recall that I said in beginning, that I regarded the problem of Federal-State relations as one of the most important for the colleges and the Department. I do not think of it as the most important, however. I think our biggest problem is to interpret clearly the civilization in which we live, so that we can reach agreement on fundamental objectives for agriculture and on division of responsibilities. I think that our common denominators are practically the same. We think in the same broad terms of the economic, social and spiritual welfare of the people who live upon the land, and feel that in assisting them in working out their problems we are assisting our whole democracy to solve its problems. As we move along in land-use planning, and as communities more and more affiliate themselves, there will more clearly arise the question, "What are our objectives, what ends are we seeking?" We can state some of those ends in terms of biological and physical sciences. But I am not at all certain that we can state with equal clarity our objectives in the social sciences, philosophy, and religion. Sometimes I feel the social sciences and philosophy are making more rapid progress in relation to agriculture than we are giving them credit for. At the same time, the majority of the problems we put up to the social scientists are ones which require more or less immediate answers.

I think the common objectives, the common ends, which the land-grant colleges and Federal Department of Agriculture are seeking in rural civilization are largely the same. We have a common agriculture. It needs cooperative action by the land-grant colleges and the Federal Department to supply the services the Nation expects. The clarity with which we see the common ends will insure, I think, a common means.

